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ABSTRACT

About 50 percent of Sweden's adult population pursues studies in one form or another. A specifically Scandinavian form of adult education is the folk high school. By far the largest number of adult learners attend the study circles organized by the local branches of Sweden's educational associations. Formal adult education and vocational training are offered by the local education committees in all 286 municipalities. Municipal authorities are also mandated to organize adult basic education. Special adult educational opportunities include Swedish language instruction for immigrants, adult education for intellectually handicapped persons, national schools that offer the same kind of formal adult education as does municipal adult education, and public libraries and audiovisual centers. Participants in employment training receive free tuition and training allowances. Access is conditional on current or imminent unemployment. Inhouse education has expanded faster than any other form of adult education. The major trade unions have shown keen interest in the form and content of adult education. More responsibility for adult education has been vested in the municipalities; activities once controlled by regulations and funding are now managed by objectives and results. All categories of adult education generally receive government subsidies. Trade unions have assumed a leading role in program coordination; municipal governments and educational associations have initiated far-reaching collaboration. (YLB)

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Adult Education in Sweden

Fact Sheets on Sweden

Swedish Institute

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Adult Education in Sweden

About 50% of Sweden's adult population pursues studies in one form or another. This is a very high proportion by world standards, and may be partly explained by the great variety of forms of adult study that have gradually emerged in the past hundred years and been justified on different grounds. Those forms which have their roots in the popular movements and are still firmly established there—folk high schools and study circles—are the oldest examples. Correspondence schools and courses arranged by the broadcasting media and the labor market organizations are other important forms. As a modern labor market policy took shape it provided for public employment training, which is especially intended for the unemployed and people in danger of losing their jobs. In 1968, a state-run system of adult education was augmented by a municipally sponsored system. It gives adults greater opportunities to study at levels corresponding to the compulsory comprehensive school and the upper secondary school. In addition, there are the educational activities provided by companies and administrative authorities for their personnel.

The forms of education and training mentioned above are usually referred to collectively as "adult education." As such it is a category made to include all education which normally does not tie in with previous formal schooling, and which commences for the vast majority of participants after a shorter or longer period of gainful employment or work in the home. This text will be mainly confined to the following types of adult education: folk high school, study circles, municipal and state-run formal adult education and employment training. In spite of the fact that many adults take advantage of increased access to higher education, this type of education does not fit into the Swedish concept of adult education and is not covered by the following exposition.

All the above categories of adult education generally receive government subsidies.

Let us summarize the aims of adult education. To begin with, adult education should enable middle-aged and older people to raise their level of general knowledge and increase their opportunities for taking part in cultural, social and political activities. It should contribute to the further democratization of society. Adult education should strengthen the position of individuals in working life. It should, however, also cater for individual preferences and needs.

Since the late sixties, adult education has come to cover larger and larger areas. Its forms of distribution have changed several times and the economic conditions for studies have improved. However, with the fiscal situation so precarious in recent years, some restraints have been imposed.

As of 1976, employers began paying a special payroll tax for education. This money is used, among other things, to finance a restricted number of study allowances for adults undergoing education, following the same general principles as for other adult students but also taking into account their obligation to support a family.

All employees enjoy an unconditional right to take leave of absence for studies that must be pursued during working hours. Although the leave to which they are entitled by law is unpaid, certain grants are available. A limited number of hourly and daily study grants provide compensation for loss of income. Studies which must be pursued for longer, uninterrupted periods qualify for a special adult study allowance.

For natural reasons the major trade union confederations have shown keen interest both in the form and content of adult education. Recent developments have largely been impelled by union demands.

Folk high schools

A specifically Scandinavian form of adult education is the folk high school, which is mainly residential. The folk high school is not the form of adult education with the greatest number of participants, but it is the oldest one. The first folk high schools were founded in the mid-19th century to give young rural adults better opportunities for general education. Now they receive students from all strata of life. Today, the folk high schools are owned either by county councils or by trade unions, churches, temperance societies or other non-profit organizations.

Each school determines its own curriculum. In spite of the fact that there is no official syllabus or compulsory subject matter for folk high schools, some courses can qualify students for university studies. Studies focus on topic areas rather than on single subjects. A significant feature of these schools is the high degree of student participation in educational planning and implementation.

In recent years the around 130 folk high schools have together enrolled about 230,000 students annually. The schools offer a variety of courses ranging from two days to over 80 weeks in length. The past few years have witnessed a changing pattern of recruitment to folk high schools. Great numbers of students are recruited for short courses which the voluntary educational associations, the popular movements and the trade unions organize in partnership with these schools. Enrollments have also increased among the ranks of immigrants and the disabled. An extensive pilot scheme for the instruction of disabled persons is financed with special government funds. Some schools have special programs for young adults who are unemployed and who generally lack interest in studies and vocational training. Many students take long courses to train themselves for full-time leadership of leisure activities. Other schools offer long-term courses in music, art, international development studies, environmental problems, etc. Sign-language interpreters are trained at an establishment with an exclusively sign-language environment.

Training of teachers for the folk high schools is organized at the University of Linköping. The training period is one year. Before entering, the students have a university degree and some experience of adult education or a thorough knowledge in the field of adult education acquired over many years of practical work. The training combines theory with practice.

Voluntary educational associations

By far the largest number of today's adult learners attend the study circles organized by the local branches of Sweden's educational associations. In the fiscal year 1990/91, nearly 344,000 study circles attracted about 2,868,000 participants, of whom slightly over half were women. This figure should be put in relation to Sweden's total population of 8.6 million and its adult population (aged 20–67) of about five million. These study circles are sponsored by eleven voluntary educational associations, of which the largest, the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), accounts for one third of the total study circle hours.

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A study circle has traditionally been defined as "an informal group which meets for the common pursuit of well-planned studies of a subject or problem area which has previously been decided upon." The group itself determines how its work is to be planned and carried out. A circle leader has certain coordinating and administrative tasks but does not act as a teacher in the ordinary sense. There are no formal requirements for circle leaders.

A study circle normally has between five and twenty members. The length of an average study circle is about 30 hours, usually divided into 8–10 meetings. A national government subsidy covers about 40 % of the costs, with the remainder coming from fees and municipal grants. Study circle sessions are supplemented by cultural activities such as amateur projects and cultural programs for associations and societies.

Two subject areas account for two thirds of the study circle hours: esthetic (arts) subjects and civics. Study circles in civics, Swedish and mathematics, and study circles for disabled persons and in the native languages of immigrants have been given higher priority through a system of extra government subsidies.

Municipal adult education

Formal adult education—both general education and vocational training—is offered by the local education committees in all of Sweden's 286 municipalities and also, in certain educational fields (e.g. the care

sector), by the 23 county councils. In addition there are two national schools for adults which provide supplementary educational opportunities (see below).

The municipal adult education *(komvux)* curriculum which came into force in 1982 confirmed the divorce between this type of adult education and youth education. This curriculum is specially designed for adults, based on adult needs and tailored to the situation of the adult. All courses and leaving certificates are comparable with those of youth education, and educational standards are intended to be the same in both systems.

Municipal adult education offers studies at compulsory and upper secondary school level and also includes supplementary courses. The latter should lead to a new level in the occupation concerned or to a new occupation altogether and they are designed to meet educational needs not existing in the youth education sector.

Courses and leaving certificates are based on the modular system, which can be regarded as a modified unit/credit system. This makes it possible for the adult participant to begin studying in accordance with his own needs, i.e. to supplement previous basic education and/or job experience.

There are few formal obstacles built into the system. The adult student enters the modular system at the level which is suitable for him and studies as far as he needs to, either part-time or full-time.

The individual determines his own workload, in keeping with his circumstances and is free to compose his own study program according to personal preference and needs. He can study during the daytime or evening, combine general subject courses with vocational courses, attend just a single subject course in the evenings or else include a maximum of educational activity in the working week. He may combine studies with full-time gainful employment or study full-time on a government grant for a limited period.

There are no major formal impediments such as entrance requirements or examinations. Individual opportunities are limited only by practical and economic constraints.

Formal adult education is organized into separate adult education units in more than 150 municipalities. Elsewhere it is led by the principal of a youth education school. Many teachers divide their time between adult education and youth education.

Just as in youth education, instruction is free of charge and legislation passed in the mid-1970s entitles adults to special forms of study assistance and also to educational leave. This led to an increase in the full-time daytime student population, but the traditional part-time adult student attending evening classes still predominates.

In addition to qualifying for higher studies, many students use this kind of adult education as a means of improving their professional qualifications, for instance by attending computer science courses. Others may obtain their basic qualifications for a certain job, for example in the restaurant trade or the care sector.

Municipal adult education opportunities range from short-cycle vocational courses to post-secondary academic courses or advanced full-time vocational education.

According to the latest figures, the number of participants in municipal adult education (for a selected week) was roughly 160,000, of whom some 100,000 were women. On average, students take two courses at once. More than 30% of the students are taking general subjects at upper secondary school level, while 25% are undergoing vocational education and the remainder are taking courses at a lower level.

Efforts have been made recently to bring formal municipal adult education more closely into line with the immediate requirements of the labor market and in fact to utilize this kind of adult education as an instrument of labor market policy.

Municipalities can also sell municipal adult education courses to companies and authorities on a contract basis. This gives adults an opportunity of improving their formal qualifications within the framework of personnel training activities. The volume of this contracted education activity equals roughly 20% of the total formal adult education output offered by the municipalities but is expected to increase.

Basic education for adults

Legislation was introduced in 1977 requiring municipal authorities to organize a special form of adult education known as basic education for adults.

Basic education for adults was originally intended for illiterate or poorly educated immigrants. Later on it came to be provided also for Swedes who were "functionally illiterate" and whose knowledge of school subjects was appreciably inferior to that of the average compulsory school pupil. About 35% of the 25,500 people taking part in basic education for adults in the school year 1989/90 were Swedes.

Under a new scheme of basic adult education as a part of municipal adult education, effective from 1 July 1992, it is the duty of municipal authorities to offer adult education to adults lacking the knowledge and skills that children acquire in compulsory schooling.

The purpose of this new basic adult education is to give adults a broad, general competence for working life and for participation in the life of the community. This education should also be capable of providing a foundation for further studies.

To make the new basic adult education suitable for adults, studies have to be organized on a highly flexible basis. Accordingly, participants can choose between full-time and part-time studies, and basic adult education can be combined with other educational activity, e.g. vocational education at upper secondary level.

Swedish for immigrants

Swedish language instruction for adult immigrants was reformed in 1986 and now takes the form of basic Swedish-language instruction. Tuition is free of charge and, on average, comprises 700 hours. The municipalities are responsible for providing basic Swedish-language instruction for immigrants. This instruction has to be offered to immigrants as soon as possible after they arrive in Sweden, usually within two years.

Adult education for the intellectually handicapped

After nearly twenty years' experimentation, a regular scheme of adult education for the intellectually handicapped *(särvux)* was introduced in 1988. To begin with, this corresponded to the instruction otherwise provided in special compulsory school for the mentally retarded, but today it can also include instruction at training school level, as well as vocational education. Responsibility, initially, was vested in the county councils, but is now being transferred to the municipalities.

National schools for adults

Educational opportunities of roughly the same kind as formal municipal adult education and based on the same curriculum are offered by two national schools for adults. These provide a supplement to municipal adult education for persons who for various reasons (shift work, geographical distance, etc.) are unable to attend regular courses. The courses at these schools combine various educational methods, including distance studies and intensive short-cycle courses.

Public libraries and audio-visual centers

Public libraries and audio-visual aids centers run by local education committees play an important part in adult education. Libraries lend books, tapes and filmstrips to study circles, schools and private persons. The centers record radio broadcasts and provide copying and lending services. The libraries arrange exhibitions, lectures, concerts, etc. which tie in with study circles and courses.

Employment training

Employment training is training or education awarded by the public employment service and qualifying for a training allowance. It must be expected to lead to permanent employment. This training is primarily vocational, but it can also include introductory or general theoretical instruction as a necessary adjunct of vocational training.

Participants receive free tuition and training allowances. The allowances are paid at the same rates as unemployment insurance compensation, in the case of those entitled to such benefits; other participants receive a lower rate.

Access to employment training is conditional on current or imminent unemployment, added to which the applicant must be at least 20 years old and registered with the public employment service as a jobseeker. (These are the main rules, but there are certain exceptions to them.)

Employment training forms part of an active labor market policy aimed at reducing unemployment, promoting economic growth and supporting disadvantaged groups. As a labor market policy program, training should be capable of yielding relatively swift results in the form of employment, and so it is not so broad-based as regular youth education. Training activities continue, as far as possible, all the year round without any subdivision into terms and with new participants free to enter as soon as there are vacancies.

Primarily, employment training takes the form of courses purchased by a county labor board or an employment office. If no suitable course is available in this way, a jobseeker qualifying for employment training can receive a training allowance for instruction within the regular education system. This option is intended, for example, for the occupationally handicapped.

County labor boards and employment offices plan their purchasing of employment training with reference to the needs of the labor market and their knowledge as to which groups of jobseekers have difficulty in finding work. They can purchase training from AMU (see below), municipal commissioned education, companies, higher education establishments and organizations. Training at post-secondary level is subject to certain restrictions on its focus and scale.

Every year about 100,000 persons receive employment training. The volume of training has been rising considerably since the spring of 1991, due to the employment situation and to implementation of the "work strategy," which means that jobseekers with the employment service are primarily offered employment or training.

About half the participants are women. Immigrants and occupationally handicapped persons each make up about one-fifth of the total number, thereby constituting a larger percentage of participants than of jobseekers.

Rather less than half of all employment trainees have, at most, received nine years' compulsory schooling and the same number have attended upper secondary school. The remaining 7% have had some form of higher education.

Training lasts, on average, for between 25 and 30 weeks, and training activities focus mainly on manufacturing industry, caring services and office/administrative occupations.

For several years in succession, the National Labor Market Board has carried out follow-up surveys to see how large a proportion of participants are employed six months after completing their vocational training. For many years the proportion was a steady 70% or so, but in the currently adverse employment situation it has fallen to 51% (1992).

The AMU Group is a national authority acting on a commission basis and concerned above all with arranging employment training and selling it to county labor boards and employment offices. There are about 100 training units in Sweden altogether. AMU has to compete with other educational mandators and companies, as regards sales both to the Labor Market Administration and to others.

As mentioned above, employment training is available to persons applying for work through the employment service. The employment service can also apply its funds to encouraging urgently needed personnel training, especially in small and medium businesses. As a rule, employment training is also taken to include training for established employees, in cases where the employer receives training grants through the employment service.

This training can be aimed at preventing lay-offs or personnel cuts or at helping to adjust the skills of employees in connection with technical changes, or changes of work organization. Training is the employer's responsibility and can take place within the company or on the premises of an outside training provider. The employer continues to pay the employees' wages during their training.

In recent years the number of persons taking part annually in corporate personnel training has been 28,000, and the average duration of training has been about 300 hours.

Trainee reliefs were introduced in 1991 with the aim of encouraging employers to upgrade their employees' skills, as well as giving the employment service access to temporary job opportunities for replacement. As a financial incentive, the employer can deduct the temporary employees' wages (at a flat rate corresponding to average unemployment insurance benefits) and certain training costs from payroll tax.

The Swedish Parliament and Government make a funding allocation for labor market policy programs through the national budget. More than half this allocation is applied to employment training (course expenses, training allowances and corporate training grants).

The National Labor Market Board (*Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, AMS*) distributes these funds to the 24 county labor boards, with reference to labor market conditions in the various counties. The Board also issues general guidelines and follows up activities in the counties.

Within the counties, the county labor boards are responsible for labor market policy activities. A proportion of the funding for labor market policy programs goes to the employment offices. Employment training courses are purchased by a county labor board or an employment office. The employment offices decide whether applicants meet the requirements for employment training and help them to choose a suitable program.

Personnel education

The in-house education provided by companies and administrative authorities expanded faster than any other form of adult education during the 1980s. As the decade moved towards its close, the number of Swedes receiving at least one day's staff training every year was put at nearly 2 million. About 40% of these people received one or two days' training, more than 30% received 3–5 days and not quite 30% were given a week or more.

One important reason behind this development is that activities in more and more fields are becoming increasingly dependent on skills and knowledge. Competence requirements are being successively raised as a result of technical progress. Good basic skills are now required of personnel in practically all employment capacities.

Personnel education is very unevenly distributed within the labor force. Both the proportion of employees receiving such education and the scope of the education itself are commensurate with employees' educational and salary levels. Public sector employees, relatively speaking, are offered more education than private employees and men are offered more education than women. In the enterprise sector, the biggest investments in personnel education are made by relatively large and profitable concerns in expanding industries. Then again, personnel education is more widespread in service-producing enterprises than in manufacturing industry. This in turn engenders great regional differences in educational spending.

Personnel education, by definition, is financed by employers. To a great extent it takes place during working hours, but there are also cases of education being financed or otherwise supported by employers outside working hours. Personnel education is organized partly by companies and administrative authorities themselves, through education departments or suchlike, but it has also generated a market for education in which municipalities, through their schools, labor market training, universities and university colleges as well as private educational consultants are active.

Training programs sponsored by employee organizations

Sweden's two largest employee organizations, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Central Organization of Salaried Employees (TCO), have extensive study programs of their own. They are designed to give union members a solid background in union affairs and other social matters. They also supply trained union officials at local, regional and national levels. Most courses are residential and last one or two weeks, but some last up to six months. There are no government subsidies for these programs.

Radio, television and correspondence schools

Educational programs on radio and television are produced by a special corporation which operates on government funds. The programs are aimed at the regular schools as well as at adult students and undergraduates in higher education. Broadcast programs are usually supplemented with printed study material. The broadcasting media collaborate with various sponsors of adult education.

Two correspondence schools, *Hermods* and *Brevskolan*, dominate this educational medium. Hermods designs courses chiefly aimed at helping people fulfill the formal requirements for completion of courses at compulsory comprehensive, upper secondary and university levels. Brevskolan mainly caters for the needs of various special-interest organizations.

In recent years the traditional type of correspondence course has been increasingly combined with other forms of instruction, especially study circles and educational broadcasts. This type of combined course generally leads to more effective learning than pure correspondence courses.

Adult education target groups

The heavy expansion of adult education during the first half of the 1970s derived its ideological sustenance from the introduction of nine years' compulsory schooling for all children. One of its cardinal aims was the egalitarian one of bridging the "educational gap" which the reform of compulsory schooling interposed between different generations.

Today, at the beginning of the 1990s, inequalities of education and knowledge have come to be a good deal more complicated. In the first place, practically all youngsters receive 11 years' continuous schooling and it has now been decided that upper secondary schooling should be extended to three years for all participants. Secondly, a growing proportion of the adult population are taking part in adult education, not least in the form of staff training. Thirdly, demographic changes are rapidly reducing the percentage of adults in the workforce whose education has been of very brief duration. Fourthly, there is the growing realization that learning to a very great extent takes place informally, during working and leisure hours, in addition to formal, quantifiable instruction. Finally, all sectors of working life are making new demands on knowledge and on capacity for personal development.

It is thus more accurate to speak in terms of knowledge gaps between individuals and groups of individuals than of an intergenerational education gap. These knowledge gaps, of course, are partly a matter of differences in the length of formal schooling. Another, equally important cause, however, is the differing extent to which individuals have assimiliated their formal education. Youngsters who have not benefitted fully from their nine years' compulsory schooling are particularly vulnerable. Personnel education is very unevenly distributed between members of the community. Over time this bias helps to widen knowledge gaps. Differences in the content and organization of work and differences in leisure-time social conditions mean that different people have very different opportunities for informal learning.

General adult education has the task of helping to reduce these knowledge gaps. This, of course, means special emphasis on measures for those with least formal education behind them, but it also means responsibilities towards those who have completed a longer study program but, for some reason or other, need to expand or deepen their education so as to retain their footing in the employment sector. This is where public adult education must try to counteract the injustices which personnel education entails. But adult education still has important target groups in those who leave compulsory school with

their education incomplete, older persons whose schooling has been of brief duration, the disabled, who have often been at a disadvantage in school as well as immigrants from countries with less developed school systems.

Supervision, evaluation and development

National control of the school sector has been fundamentally transformed in recent years. More responsibility has been vested in the municipalities, and activities, which used to be controlled by regulations and funding, are now managed by objectives and results.

The National Agency for Education *(Skolverket)* is the central national authority in charge of public-sector schools for children, young persons and adults. As such it has two main tasks: follow-up and evaluation of the school system, and educational development.

Where municipal adult education, adult education for the intellectually handicapped, Swedish for immigrants and national schools for adults are concerned, the first of these main tasks means that the Agency is responsible for national follow-up and evaluation of public-sector school activities. This applies both to results and organization and economics. In addition, the Agency supervises municipal compliance with the provisions of the Education Act and respect for the rights of the individual.

The second main task of the Agency is to develop the public-sector school system. This means that the Agency must compile documentation and proposals for development in general, long-range terms—curricular and syllabus development—but also for changes to national policy instruments within limited fields, as well as more short-term measures.

The voluntary educational associations and the folk high schools have jointly set up the National Council for Adult Education *(Folkbildningsrådet)*, which is responsible for the distribution of government subsidies to study circles and folk high schools and for evaluating the activities of these establishments.

Financing adult education

All three levels of education in Sweden—compulsory comprehensive, upper secondary and higher education — are financed in their entirety out of public funds. No tuition fees are charged. There are a few private schools. Those students who continue their studies beyond the nine-year compulsory school receive a government study allowance, which is a continuation of the monthly child allowance the government paid earlier to their parents. Undergraduates in universities, university colleges and professional schools receive government study assistance in the form of grants and repayable loans. It is only natural that adult learners should be eligible in principle for the same tuition-free instruction and the same study assistance when they take the same types of courses as their younger counterparts.

Study assistance is also payable in the form of hourly and daily study grants to adults who pursue adult studies either for shorter periods or for part of the day on a systematic basis. The hourly study grant makes it feasible to pursue studies in study-circle form on work-time, while the daily study grant helps cover the cost of board and lodging and compensates for the income lost when short courses are taken at folk high schools. The study grant payable to adult students was reformed in 1975 and has been steadily improved since then. Public policy measures in this area have sharply stepped up the inflows into different kinds of adult studies, mainly the municipal adult education and the study circles.

Except for study circles, the types of adult education described above are in principle entirely free of charge, although in practice there may be some expenses for study materials. The tuition fees paid by participants in study circles are quite low.

More than one tenth of the national outlay on education goes to the various kinds of adult education that are described here. On top of that, an equal amount is spent on advancing allowances to students enrolled in employment training, which is entirely government-financed. Local authority expenditure on adult education has also increased rapidly. Municipal governments pay about one third of the costs of municipal adult education and about the same proportion of the costs of study circles.

National, county and municipal governments together employ more than one fourth of Sweden's working population. Their staff training programs are extensive and are aimed at all categories of employees. Thus through direct payments, subsidy systems and financial assistance to students, the national, county and local governments pay the lion's share of adult education costs in Sweden. Other contributors to these costs include the popular movements, political and non-profit organizations, trade unions and private companies.

Coordination of adult education programs

An important prerequisite for the rapid growth of adult education in recent years has been collaboration between the various agencies and organizations involved. The trade unions have assumed a leading role from the very start, as have the political parties. The political decisions on which the current adult education system is based were reached through consensus among the political parties.

Municipal governments and the educational associations have initiated far-reaching collaboration and created a conscious division of labor on the local plane. Through the national student union and its local branches, the adult learners themselves have become involved in designing the adult education system, recruiting new target groups, encouraging educational development work and improving the financial aid system.

However, coordination is aspired to not only where different kinds of adult education are concerned. The feasibility of coordinating upper secondary education with municipal adult education and employment training will also be investigated. These integrating efforts should lead to more efficient methods of organizing adult courses and should give the individual student better economic conditions and better service facilities. In this way it should become possible for all adults to take part in a process of recurrent education that will help them perform better in their occupations as well as in their general role as members of Swedish society.

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